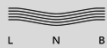


# Latvia's historical sound recordings collection – a window to the music of another era

Zane Grosa  
National Library of Latvia  
IAML 2023, Cambridge, UK

When starting work at the National Library of Latvia some years ago in the «Fonotēka» – or the Sound Records Library, my first job was to catalogue the various sound recordings. There were shelves and shelves around me of unprocessed items – previously acquired materials and donations. When I wanted some change from my usual cataloguing, I started investigating these different materials. Some years later, out of this grew the Latvia's historical sound recordings collection.

- First sound recordings acquired in 1961, established as a department in 1975
- Legal Deposit of Latvia's AV publications (since 2006)
- Materials pertaining to Latvia or Latvians published elsewhere, including diaspora
- 90'000 physical items - sound recordings, videos, multimedia materials, language and other subjects teaching kits with AV component
- Collection for lifelong education, research, leisure



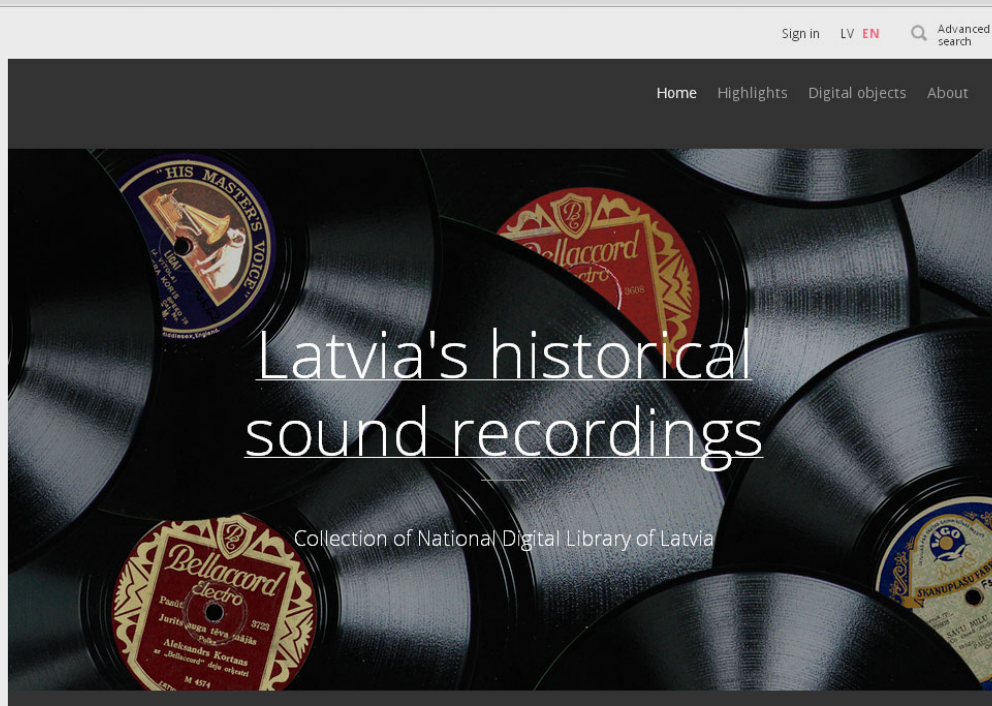
First sound recordings were purchased by the library in 1961, but the Sound Recording Library was established in 1975.

A significant part of the collection consists of AV materials published or produced in Latvia, in different times and on different carriers.

The National Library is the receiver of the Legal Deposit of all kinds of materials published in Latvia, and AV materials are included in the Legal Deposit law since 2006. One of the main responsibilities is to preserve the Latvian publications for ever and to make them accessible to everyone.

It is also important to collect and preserve sound and video recordings published abroad that have a connection to Latvia or Latvians, as well as materials published by Latvians that have emigrated to different parts of the world.

Another emphasis is on creating a collection that promotes education, studies and research, and leisure needs of the readers.



audio.lndb.lv

In the autumn of 2013 the National Library of Latvia launched a new online audio collection – Latvia's historical sound recordings (<http://audio.lndb.lv/en/>). The opening date of the collection was planned so as to mark the UNESCO World Day for Audiovisual Heritage (27 October).

From several thousand shellac records that the library holds, those that have a connection with Latvia or people from Latvia were selected for the inclusion in the digital collection.

After making a start just with the library's holdings, we were lucky that a well known private collector in Latvia with an extensive collection of records agreed to give his shellacs to include in the collection. Later on, some museums in Riga provided valuable additions too, as well as some other private collectors.

Because of this successful cooperation with private collectors and museums, "Latvia's historical sound recordings collection" can be regarded as a comprehensive and representative repository of Latvia's sound recording history. It now contains close to 4000 objects, and many of the recordings can be listened freely online.

The collection includes records that were made from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1960s, and they are almost all of them, 78's, that is, they play at 78 revolutions per minute.

Latvian shellac record, published by Pathé around 1911



Shellac record player produced by the Latvian Music Instrument factory in Riga (Latvijas Mūzikas Instrumentu Fabrika Rīgā, 1929-1936)

Shellacs or 78s, also called coarse groove gramophone discs, were the main mass produced audio format of the first half of the 20th century.

The first 'gramophone' or record player was patented by the German inventor Emil Berliner in 1887. At first, the records were one-sided, 12 cm in diameter, and made of tin. After several experiments and improvements, a mixture of shellac was identified as the most suitable material for production, until vinyl was discovered, consequently, these records are known as shellac records. The optimum playback speed evolved as 78 rpm, although other variations in playback speed existed. The most common size for records was 25 cm in diameter, and about 3 minutes of sound could be recorded on each side of the record. 30 cm sized records were also common, used for longer pieces of music, for example, opera fragments.





The first sound recordings in Latvia, as in many European countries, were made by the Gramophone company. The company's factory in Riga also became its first factory in Eastern Europe, and many records with Latvian content, such as works by Latvian composers and folk songs, were made here.

Between 1903 and 1915, Gramophone, Zonophone and His Master's Voice released around 400 Latvian recordings. During this period, Latvian records were also published by other foreign companies, both as pirated re-issues and original recordings – so we can add another 200 records to the count.

The production of records in Riga was stopped in 1915, when the factory was evacuated to Moscow in connection with the first World War.

## *Bellaccord Electro founded in 1931 in Riga*



Founder of Bellaccord Electro  
Helmārs Rudzītis (1903-2001)



Thirty years later – in 1931 – successful businessman and entrepreneur Helmārs Rudzītis establishes in Riga the record factory “Bellaccord Electro”. This enabled local musicians to make recordings in their homeland.

In the first years of its existence, the factory produced 600 records per day. The company owned a shop in the Riga centre, and could also boast of a relatively wide export of production to Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Sweden.

The fate of “Bellaccord Electro” was closely linked to that of Latvia itself, and is reflected in the varying images of the labels, and in the changes of the factory name and owners. After the Soviet occupation in the 1940s the factory was nationalised.

During the time between both World Wars other companies beside Bellaccord Electro were producing records with Latvian music or performers, as reflected in the collection.





## DIGITAL OBJECTS

- Genres
  - Songs
  - Foxtrots
  - War songs
  - Cinema music
  - Choirs
  - Operas
  - Orchestral music
  - Polkas
  - Popular music
  - Speeches
  - Tango
  - Folk dances, Latvian
  - Folk songs, Latvian
  - Waltzes
- Composers
- Performers
- Publishers

### Digital objects

"Karmen" maršs

"Melnā Zoba" restorānā : jautrs foks-maršs

[Lilit A. P.]

12 laupītāji

15. maija parādes maršs

18. parādē

## BELLACORD ELECTRO

- Genres
- Composers
- Performers
- Publishers
  - Bellacord Electro
  - Bonophon
  - His Master's Voice
  - Homocord
  - Homophon
  - Kristall
  - Latvian Music
  - Метрополь Рекорды
  - Odeon
  - Parlophon
  - Polydor
  - Rīgas skaņuplašu fabrika Līgo
  - Sound studio Da Capo
  - Vox
  - Tri-Ergon
  - Zonophone Record

### Digital objects

"Karmen" maršs

15. maija parādes maršs

18. novembra parādes maršs

Aber greb't muass er sein : Wiener-Heurigenmarsch

Achejnu kol bejs jisroel

Ačkups : tautas deja

Recordings can be browsed by Genres, Composers, Performers, and Publishers. Not all genres and composers are shown in the drop-down lists, but rather the more often used genres, and those composers that are free of copyright. Some of the objects in the collection do not have a play button, unfortunately this is connected to a particular access status of the object, but there is a way around it, if one uses the National Library's digital library site – [digitalbiblioteka.lv](http://digitalbiblioteka.lv)

The musical content of the collection is quite varied – there are folk songs, choirs, popular music and fragments from operas, classical music, humorous songs and sketches. Among the performers are many well-known names in Latvia, as well as artists that are less well known today.





**Augstāk par visu**

**Šķaņu plates**

**Bellaccord-Electro**

L N B

Русский баллаженный оркестръ съ плініємъ  
3320 Дит. гитары. Романсы  
3167 Огенья. Болга. Болга. Русская пісня  
Гайда-гайда

M. ГАРТМАНЪ и веселые гармонисты  
3658 Веселые частушки  
Станочекъ

**Plates angļu valodā**

5 ALDIANOVI  
3749 Bei mir bist du schön Ch. Secunda  
Tiger Hunt Larocca

SAMS BASKINI un viņa džezs simfonijā no Ņu-  
jorkas ar angļu refrēnu  
3121 Skatīt džezs collid. Fokstrots Florito  
Vispārīgā dziedāt peldoties. Fokstrots Mojibaus

**Plates vācu valodā**

„Jazz-Orchester Bellaccord“ mit deutschem  
Refraingesang  
3569 Sey zum Abschied leise „Servus“. Engl. Walzer  
Blumen aus Nizza. Tango  
3565 Schön sind die Frau'n. Foxtrot  
Ich will, ich will' ein Hahn. Foxtrot  
3264 Zigeunerkind. Tango L. Aronson  
Komm, wollen wir zusammen träumen. Foxt.  
L.  
3169 Ob du mich wirklich lieb hast? Tango F. M.  
Auf Wiedersehen, My Dear! Top-trott A. B.

62

Die berühmten 5 BELCANTOS — jetzt auch auf  
„Bellaccord-Electro“  
3386 Kety. Foxtrot  
3388 Na, wie geht's. Foxtrot  
3388 Ich sing' mich in dein Herz hinein. Engl. Walzer  
Frühlingstimmen. Walzer  
3387 Eine Reise durch die Schloßerwelt  
W. Kollo

FRED BIRD'S Ritmiker mit Refrainsgesang  
3274 Gruss und Kuss Veronika. Foxtrot Wachmann  
An der Donau, wenn der Wein blüht. Walzer Große  
3275 Ach, Laisel. Foxtrot K. Benatzky  
Südlisches Feuer! Spanischer Marsch Borchert  
3276 In deine Hände. Tango W. Kollo  
Schön ist jeder Tag, den du mir schenkst.  
Marie-Louise. Walzer W. Meisel

PAUL von BECKY mit seinem Orchester aus dem  
Europa-Pavillon, Berlin  
3184 Zigeuner, du hast mein Herz gestohlen. Tango Egon-Grothe  
Für dich, Rio-Rita. Passo doble Szentgini  
3190 Original-Tangonilla K. Benatzky  
3191 Für dich, Rio-Rita. Passo doble Szentgini  
3191 Es ist so schön am Abend bummeln zu gehn. F. Abraham  
Foxtrot  
Worum bin ich verliebt in Dich? Foxtrot P. Abraham

Jazz-Orchester EDDY WALIS aus dem Eden-Hotel,  
Berlin  
3169 Es war einmal ein Musikus. Tango F. Schwarz  
Tanzt du auch so gern wie ich? Tango W. Rosen

**Bernards Derkens un viņa mākslinieki**  
no Adlonas viesnīcas Berlīnē

3088 Tātū no balles (Loin du bal) E. Gillet  
Vālsis  
Esi sveika, mana Vine. No E. Kálmán  
operetes „Gräfiene Mária“ K. Komczak  
3115 Jaurā Vine E. Waldteufel  
Zelta lietuss  
3116 Balles sīrēna. Vālsis no ope- F. Lehár  
retes „Jaurā atraitne“ Joh. Strauss  
3136 Mana dzīve ir mīla un prieks Lange  
Pūku dziesma Arnold  
Jaukā dabas stūrītī

**Herberta Smīdta orķestris**

3059 Zelts un sudrabs. Vālsis F. Lehár  
Slīdskrejeļi. Vālsis E. Waldteufel

**Salona orķestris**

3137 Johans Strauss spēl! Straussa Morena  
mūzikas popurijs I. un II. d. K. Komczak  
3112 Vasaras nakts. Vālsis E. Waldteufel  
3094 Visu par mīlu. Vālsis E. Waldteufel  
Estudiantina. Vālsis E. Waldteufel  
3100 Mīlestības vālsis J. Lanner  
Vīnes meitenes C. M. Ziehrer  
3114 Sīrēnu burvības E. Waldteufel  
Nakts jūsmā C. M. Ziehrer

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**Salona mūzika**

Berlīnes simfoniskais orķestris

3119 Dzejnieks un zemnieks. I. un Suppé  
II. daļa. Uvertūra  
3097 Jaurā atraitne. Popurijs no F. Lehár  
operetes. I. un II. daļa  
3138 Geiša — popurijs no ope- Jones  
retes. I. un II. d.



Milānas „Scala“ operas tenors SALVATORE SALVATI  
orķestra pavādjumā dziedājis itālieši

3033 Meitenes sīrēnā. Ārija no D. Verdi  
operas „Rigoletto“  
Si vai cita... Ārija no operas D. Verdi  
„Rigoletto“

Browsing through the catalogues of the Bellaccord factory, one can discover interesting facts about audience taste and popular artists of the 1930s in Latvia. About 70% of the recordings represent popular, dance and jazz music. At that time it was common to find recordings of a famous National Opera soloist performing popular songs. Serious music was in little demand, but another explanation for this could be the limited recording space on a shellac disc. One side of the 25cm disc can capture about 3 minutes of recorded sound. Besides originally recorded music, Bellaccord also offered records of internationally well-known singers, bands and orchestras.

SOUND STUDIO DA CAPO

Genres


Composers

Performers


Publishers

Digital objects


43 Records




Arhibiskapa T. Grīnberga runa : 18.11.1934 [fragments]




Brīvības pieminēkļa atklāšana : valsts prezidenta Alberta Kvieša runa 1935.g.




Doc. J. Asaris : 13.12.1934




Dr. K. Ulmaņa godināšana mazpulku organizācijas 5 gadu




Dr. K. Ulmaņa runa mazpulku vadoņu sanāksmē : 26.04.1935




Dr. med. G. Feders : 22.03.1935




Dr. V. Sanderā svētruna Liepājā : 16.12.1934 [fragments]



Generāļa Aleksandra Kalēja piemiņai : [runā] pulkvedis K. Lūjaks :



Generāļa Hartmaņa runa : 17.11.1934



Generāļa Krišjāņa Berķa runa : 11.11.1934

L

N

B

1

2

3

4

5

Next

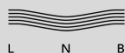
A special part of the collection contains speeches, mostly recorded during 1930s, that document either some special events, or voices of famous people – statesmen, artists, writers. Many of these are radio broadcast recordings by Riga Sound studio Da Capo, who recorded some radio broadcasts off-air, and they are unique because, as far as I know, these are the only surviving Latvian radio broadcasts from the 1930s, as the Radio's own records perished in the Second World War.

10



Ministru prezidenta Kārļa Ulmaņa runa Rīgas Radiofonā  
1934.gada 18.maijā

Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis' speech in  
Riga Radiophone on May 18, 1934 (after  
the coup d'état)



Kārlis Ulmanis

Latvia's Prime Minister's Kārlis Ulmanis speech at the Riga Radiophone shortly  
after the coup in 1934 is one of collection's rarities (<https://audio.lndb.lv/71>)

## Ārija iz operas "Rinaldo"



Title	Ārija iz operas "Rinaldo"
Alternative title	Rinaldo. Lascia ch'io pianga
Creator	Handel, George Frideric, 1685-1759
Contributor	Ašmane, Marta, dziedātājs
Resource Type	Skaņu ieraksts
Format extent	1 skpl. : analogs, 78 apgr/min, mono ; 25 cm
Subject	Operas -- Fragmenti
Date issued	[19--]
Publisher	[B.v.] : Метрополь Рекордъ
Organization in possession of the original	Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka
Location code	Fsh/160
Identifier	205
Copyright	Nav aizsargāts ar autortiesībām
Access right	Pieejams tieklīnī

It is nowadays the accepted norm that opera is performed in the original language of its composition, that is, Verdi operas are sung in Italian, Bizet's operas in French, and so on.

There are many opera arias among the historical recordings of the collection, and it was a surprise to discover that, with very few exceptions, these were sung in Latvian language.

This recording of Handel's famous aria "Lascia ch'io pianga"

(<https://audio.lndb.lv/en/50815/>, recorded around 1911-1913, is sung in Latvian.

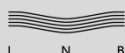
On the performance side, it is interesting to note the 'straight' tone of singing, without any vibrato, which corresponds to today's performance practice in baroque music. However, this might also have been due to the technical capability of the singer.



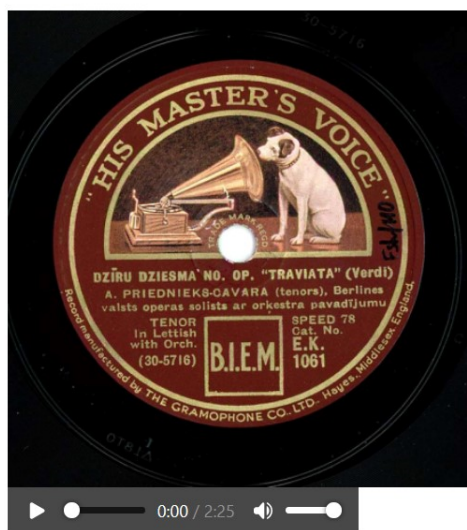


Arturs Priednieks-Kavara

Singer Arturs Priednieks-Kavara  
(1901-1979)



## Dzīru dziesma no op. "Traviata"



<b>Title</b>	Dzīru dziesma no op. "Traviata"
<b>Alternative title</b>	Traviata. Libiamo ne' lieti calici
<b>Creator</b>	Verdi, Giuseppe, 1813-1901
<b>Contributor</b>	Priednieks-Kavara, Artūrs, 1901-1979, dziedātājs
<b>Resource Type</b>	Skaņu ieraksts
<b>Format extent</b>	1 skpl. : analogs, 78 apgr/min, mono ; 25 cm
<b>Subject</b>	Operas -- Fragmenti
<b>Date issued</b>	[19--]
<b>Publisher</b>	[England] : His Master's Voice
<b>Organization in possession of the original</b>	Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka
<b>Location code</b>	Fsh/110
<b>Identifier</b>	E.K.1061
<b>Copyright</b>	Nav aizsargāts ar autortiesībām
<b>Access right</b>	Pieejams tīmeklī

Share

This famous aria from Verdi's Traviata:

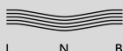
<https://audio.lndb.lv/en/49581/> , recorded in 1931, again is sung in Latvian.

The singer – Arturs Priednieks-Kavara, was one of the great Latvian tenors. He received additional musical education in Germany, where he also sang at the Berlin Opera from 1927-31. From 1931 he sang all the best tenor roles in the Latvian National Opera, and also performed at the opera houses in Vienna, Graz and Zurich.

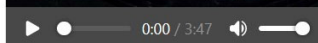
Note that, whenever possible, in the item's metadata we have supplied the name of the opera and aria in the original language as well.



Singer Elfrīda Pakule  
(1912-1991)



## Kur bijāt, dienas saulainās : ārija no operas "Traviata"



<b>Title</b>	Kur bijāt, dienas saulainās : ārija no operas "Traviata"
<b>Alternative title</b>	La Traviata. Ah, fors' è lui che anima
<b>Creator</b>	Verdi, Giuseppe, 1813-1901
<b>Contributor</b>	Pakule, Elfrida, 1912-1991, dziedātājs
<b>Contributor</b>	Vējš, Teodors, 1902-1965, dirigents
<b>Contributor</b>	Latvijas Nacionālā opera. Orķestris, izpildītājs
<b>Resource Type</b>	Skaņu ieraksts
<b>Format extent</b>	1 skpl. : analogs, 78 apgr/min, mono ; 25 cm
<b>Subject</b>	Operas -- Fragmenti
<b>Date issued</b>	[19--]
<b>Publisher</b>	Latvija : Bellaccord Electro
<b>Organization in possession of the original</b>	Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka
<b>Location code</b>	Fsh/143
<b>Identifier</b>	3822
<b>Copyright</b>	Nav aizsargāts ar autortiesībām
<b>Access right</b>	Pieejams tieklī

Another great 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian opera voice, a coloratura soprano, whose recording legacy is a powerful witness to her remarkable voice, is Elfrīda Pakule. Her path to the opera stage was forged with slow and patient work, but fame and success came fast and was spectacular. It might be interesting to note, that when she started her studies in singing, her voice teacher imposed the following rules:

- scales practice only for the first 2 years;
- it was forbidden to learn by listening to the recordings of other singers;
- and only after 8 years of private teaching was she permitted to make her debut in a radio broadcast.



Composer Emīls Dārziņš  
(1875-1910)

L N B

## SEARCH

Digital objects

8 Records



Melancholiskais  
valsis



Melancholiskais  
valsis



Melancholiskais  
valsis



Melancholiskais  
valsis



Melancholiskais  
valsis



Melancholiskais  
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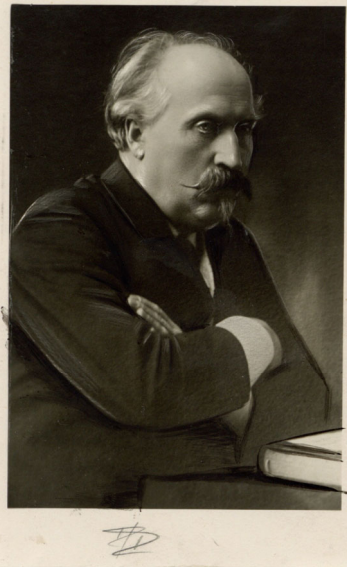


Melancholiskais  
valsis



Aside from opera, the historical sound recordings collection includes many recordings that are in one way or another important parts of Latvia's music history.

One of the most recorded composers at the beginning of the last century turned out to be Emīls Dārziņš, whose 14 songs have been immortalized in 25 recordings, and his **Melancholic waltz** - the only surviving work of orchestral music has **8** different performances recorded in the collection. There is quite a sad story associated with Emīls Dārziņš - he destroyed his other symphonic works because he was accused of plagiarism, and ended his life when he was just 34, apparently throwing himself under the train. However, this could also be just a legend, as he had quite poor health.



Composer Andrejs Jūrjāns  
(1856-1922)

L N B

Digital objects
11 Records

Pūt, vējiņi, dzen laivipu : tautas dziesma

## Latvian folk song „Pūt, vējiņi” (Blow, wind, blow)

Arranged by Andrejs Jūrjāns for 4-voice mixed choir a capella, this is a truly iconic song in Latvian culture. During Soviet occupation this song served as the unofficial anthem of Latvia, and has been a staple in the choir repertoire and in the Latvian Song and Dance Festival throughout the years





This year (2023) we celebrated our 150th Latvian Song and Dance Festival, and the choir concerts still end with the arrangement of the folk song «Pūt, vējiņi».  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZtG3fg0YEA>

## Ko dziedāšu ko runāšu



Title	Ko dziedāšu ko runāšu
Contributor	Alsungas novada dziedotāji, izpildītājs
Resource Type	Skaņu ieraksts
Format extent	1 skpl. : analogs, 78 apgr/min, mono ; 25 cm
Subject	Latviešu tautasdziesmas
Date issued	[1934]
Publisher	Latvija : Bellaccord Electro
Organization in possession of the original	Armanda Būra privātkolekcija
Identifier	M39
Copyright	Nav aizsargāts ar autortiesībām
Access right	Pieejams tīmeklī

Share

L N B



In 1934, the Archives of Latvian Folklore in cooperation with the Latvian Radio recorded various folk singers and musicians of the western part of Latvia – Kurzeme, including the Suiti community. These recordings were issued by the Latvian record factory Bellaccord Electro - not for sale, but only for playing in the radio studio, and only a few copies were ever made.

The recording of “**Ko dziedāšu ko runāšu**” is a typical example of vocal drone singing, still practiced today by Suiti community women. The lead singer starts out alone singing the first two lines, then another singer repeats the same text with the same melody once again, while the rest of the group perform the long eeeeeeeeeooooo drone sound. Then the whole process starts all over again with the next two lines.



L N B

«Suitu sievas» around 2004

Lielbritānijas sūtņa Monsona runa Anglijas karaļa Georga V 25 gadu valdīšanas jubilejas dienā : 06.05.1935



<b>Title</b>	Lielbritānijas sūtņa Monsona runa Anglijas karaļa Georga V 25 gadu valdīšanas jubilejas dienā : 06.05.1935
<b>Creator</b>	Monson, Edmund John, Sir, 1883-1969
<b>Resource Type</b>	Skaņu ieraksts
<b>Format extent</b>	2 skpl. : analogs, 78 apgr/min, mono ; 25 cm
<b>Description</b>	Ieraksta beigās tiek atskaņota Lielbritānijas himna "God save the King"
<b>Abstract</b>	Anglijas karaļa 25 gadu valdīšanas jubilejas dienā. Viņa Majestāte Anglijas karalis Džordžs V. Lielbritānijas sūtņa Monsona k-ga runa 1935.g. 6. maijā [no žurnāla "Radiofona programma" (1934-1935)]
<b>Subject</b>	Lielbritānija -- Karali un valdnieki     Džordžs, V, karalis, 1865-1936 -- Gadadienas utt     Nacionālās dziesmas un himnas     Angļu runas, uzrunas utt -- Vēsture un kritika     Svētku runas -- Latvija
<b>Date issued</b>	1935
<b>Publisher</b>	Rīga : Skaņu atelē Da Capo
<b>Organization in possession of the original</b>	Latvijas Kara muzejs
<b>Copyright</b>	Nav aizsargāts ar autortiesībām
<b>Access right</b>	Pieejams tieklīn

British envoy's Sir Edmund John Monson's speech on the 25th anniversary of the reign of King George V of England, 06/05/1935

I would like to end by highlighting one of the speeches in the collection, as a 'thank you' to the host country of our conference. It was recorded in 1935:  
<https://audio.lndb.lv/en/51042/>



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- Periodika.lv, digital collection of the National Library of Latvia

Thank you!

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